

# Scientologists Found Guilty In U.S. Conspiracy Case

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U.S. District Judge Charles R. Richey yesterday found nine members of the Church of Scientology guilty of various roles in a massive criminal conspiracy to plant church spies in government agencies, break into government offices and electronically "bug" at least one Internal Revenue Service meeting.

Richey, whose ruling came after the federal government submitted nearly 300 pages of evidence against the church, did not set a sentencing date pending a presentence investigation that usually takes about one month. Eight of the defendants could receive a maximum sentence of five years in prison; one could be sentenced to a maximum of one year.

Richey's pronouncement of guilt came after a three-hour hearing marked by bitter squabbling among attorneys for both sides over suggested last-minute changes in the wording of the evidence presented.

At one point, when it appeared the carefully worked out agreement might fall through, Richey said, between loud and acrimonious exchanges among the 20 or so attorneys in the case, "If this continues, I'm going to trial."

Ultimately, however, the nine defendants—with their attorneys still claiming their refusal to agree that the government's evidence was factually correct—marched around the defense table to sign the government's "stipulation of evidence" against them. Mary Sue Hubbard, the wife of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard and the alleged leader of the conspiracy, signed first.

The rare procedure followed before Richey is not a guilty plea. It is part of a plea arrangement enforced by the judge in which the government's evidence is accepted, the defendants are found guilty, and they can still appeal legal issues to a higher court. They could not appeal if they pleaded guilty.

Under the process, both sides avoid a lengthy trial. In this case, the Scientologists can still litigate on appeal their contention that the government raids in which mounds of church documents were seized and used against them were illegal.

Seven of the defendants were found guilty yesterday of conspiracy to obstruct justice for their roles in a cover-up of the spying and burglary operation. One member was found guilty of conspiracy to steal government documents and one was found guilty of a break-in at a Justice Department office.

The Church of Scientology again yesterday maintained that it has "always been official church policy to uphold the laws of the land. The church did not and does not condone violations of this policy." It said, however, the individual defendants will have to speak for themselves.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Raymond Banoun told a reporter later yesterday, however, that his study of thousands of pages of documents seized in searches of church property shows to him "overwhelming evidence to the contrary, namely that the Church of Scientology . . . approved, condoned and engaged in gross and widespread illegality."

U.S. Attorney Carl S. Rauh said his office was "very satisfied" by the guilty verdicts and would recommend that "substantial prison terms" be imposed for most of the defendants.

The guilty verdicts against the defendants end the major phase of a criminal investigation of the group that began in June, 1976, when two church spies were apprehended while photocopying government files in the U.S. Courthouse here.

The investigation led to two massive government raids—authorized by search warrants whose legality is still being challenged by the church—of church locations here and in Los Angeles on July 8, 1977.

Church spokesmen have said that any actions its members took in infiltrating government agencies and breaking into government offices were in response to a 29-year campaign of harassment against the church by the government.

It has prepared documents showing what it calls a "picture of harassment of international proportions" by the government, replete with allegedly false information about the church in government files.

The church's troubles with the government began soon after it was founded by former writer Hubbard in the early 1950s. The church claims it was discriminated against by the IRS when some of its branches did not receive tax-exempt status as did other religions.

Other government agencies that are accused by the church of improperly spying on church activities and members include Air Force intelligence, the Secret Service, the Food and Drug Administration and the Coast Guard.

Scientology, which is described by the church as an "applied religious philosophy" that believes in the basic good of man, is a worldwide organization with headquarters in England and the U.S.

The nine members found guilty yesterday include the church's highest officials in the U.S. and persons with church titles such as Guardian and Deputy Guardian, and Guardian World-Wide.

All the defendants are from the Los Angeles area. Two of the church's leaders in England also have been charged and are awaiting extradition.

Convicted of conspiring to obstruct justice yesterday were Mary Sue Hubbard, Henning Heidt, Duke Snider, Richard Weigand, Gregory Willardson, Cindy Raymond and Gerald Bennett Wolfe. Convicted of conspiring to steal documents was Mitchell Hermann. Convicted of theft was Sharon Thomas.

The evidence presented to the court by the government shows that church spies committed scores of break-ins at government offices here and elsewhere to obtain secret files about the church and other groups. Its burglars often were rewarded by the church for successful efforts in government agencies, the evidence said.